Fraternality in times of war: a hundred years since the emblematic case of the Lodge Euphrates No. 1078

Juan Augusto Abadjian, University of Buenos Aires

I. Armenians have been one of those people who maintained their culture and traditions almost intact from antiquity to the present day. Through centuries they’ve adapted to dozens of different currents of thought and suffered persecutions of all kinds because of religion and geographic position. From an ancient Indo-European origin, they have forged their own language and coined a vast pagan history until they became the first nation that accepted Christianity as the Official State Religion. (c.301).

II. Freemasonry, as a movement generating vanguard, comes from the occidental culture. It has been defined as an Initiatic, Progressive and Philanthropic Institution officially born in the 18th century in England, though its origins can be philosophically traced to the annals of the antiquity. Due to its geographic position called Khatchmerug (way cross) the Armenian people, throughout its thousands-year-old history, has had a constant interaction with that occidental world, its modern ideas and the new illuministic trends.

III. During the second half of the 19th century, the development of an Armenian nation in the Ottoman Empire led to many young people, children of prosperous merchants, industrialists and professionals, having the possibility to travel to Europe to study (Venice, Paris, Berlin), and returning with ideas and customs of the Illuminism prevailing in the old continent. Many citizens of Armenian origin were not indifferent to the Freemasonry at all. They began being initiated in the Institution and they even had the opportunity of consecrating their own lodges of exclusive Armenian membership. What’s more, the Freemasonry of Armenian descent began as a turning point in the Ottoman Empire, where they reached a great level of evolution that remarked a highlighted period of the Modern History of the Armenian Nation.

IV. In this line of thought, and as a corollary to the Centenary of the disappearance of most of its members (1915), is remarkable the history of Lodge Euphrates No. 1078 (Yepdrad Lodge), which worked under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of Scotland and has been founded in 1910 by Professors of the legendary Euphrates College (City of Kharberd or Harpoot).

V. On the other hand, in 1908, for the first time in the history of Turkish Freemasonry the Ottoman Grand Orient was created, being its first Grand Master, the Grand Vizier and Minister of the Ottoman Empire at that time, Mr. Mehmet Talaat Pasha. During the year 1915 and after the Ottoman Empire entered in the WWI, the Grand Master Talaat Pasha ordered the imposition of the “Tehcir Law” (displacement and relocation of the Armenian population) as well as the arrest of hundreds of high ranked and well-known Armenians in Constantinople.
VI. The imposition and orders signed by Talaat Pasha reached the city of Kharberd where many of his masonic Armenian “Brethren” of the Masonic Lodge Euphrates, as well as all the Armenian population of that city, suffer persecutions and death. Almost all of the members of Euphrates Lodge died because of tortures and mass executions in the city. Others, because of the help of influential Turkish Brethren, could survive. Documented stories and circumstances happen in the life of each of the members of this Lodge, remarking deeply and philosophically the Masonic concept of “Fraternity”.